

Introduction to Predestination, Session 1

Introduction: There are a few basics we hold have historically held to as a church, and every now and then it is good to go over them: NCT, early church practice, Baptist distinctives, etc. Today we begin a series on one of those basics: Sovereign Grace/Reformed soteriology/Augustinian understanding of salvation.

Example: Many people enjoy driving a car, but far less understand what is going on underneath the hood to make the car go. We are going to look under the hood, and see what makes salvation “go.”

The goal is to pull back the curtain and look at our salvation from God’s perspective. We want to learn what we can about what God has done behind the scenes.

Ephesians 1:3-10

*****What is the point of this paragraph (1:3-10)?** The point is to show how God has blessed us in Christ: He chose us (1:4), He predestined us (1:5), He gave us redemption (1:7), He provided forgiveness (1:7), He lavished grace upon us (1:7-8), made known the mystery of His will (1:9-10).

“chose”

For what purpose did God choose us (1:4)? He chose us to be holy and blameless before Him.

What does it mean to be “holy” (1:4)? It is the exact same word translated “saints” in 1:1. The root idea of the Greek word (*hagios*) is to be set apart. In Corinth there was a temple on top of a hill outside the city dedicated to the sex goddess Aphrodite; it housed 1,000 temple prostitutes.¹ One might say these women were “holy” in the sense they were set apart from the city of Corinth, and were just like their goddess Aphrodite. We are set apart from the world in order to be like our God (Jesus). It means you are like God, who is “entirely morally pure, all the time and in every way possible.”²

ESV **Isaiah 6:3** ... one [Seraphim] called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD"

In English, to emphasize something, we underline it, or italicize it, or write in all capital letters, or add an exclamation mark. In Hebrew, to repeat something two or three times is to be proclaiming it boldly with great emphasis. The seraphim didn’t declare that God to be love, love, love, or justice, justice, justice; but rather, holy, holy, holy.

¹ “Sacred prostitution in ancient Greece”, Wikipedia.org. Accessed March 22, 2024.

² Paul Tripp, “The Doctrine of Holiness”, PaulTripp.com. Accessed March 12, 2024.

Holiness is not simply an attribute of God; it is the very essence of who He is. Everything God thinks, desires, speaks and does is utterly holy in every way.³

ESV **Isaiah 6:5** And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"

Application: Holiness is what it takes for us to be made right with God.

NIV **Hebrews 12:14** ... without holiness no one will see the Lord.

A different text states it this way:

NAS **2 Thessalonians 2:13** God has chosen you ... for salvation ...

Summary: God chose people to be holy and blameless (this encompasses salvation).

Let me ask the obvious: According to 1:4, did we choose God, or did He choose us? The text clearly states, "he chose us." God did the choosing.

When we hold political elections, we vote for (we choose) candidates for public office.⁴ So too, the Lord God Almighty Himself held an election, and he chose (He voted for, He elected) certain people for salvation.

Theologians call this the doctrine of "divine election." (*Write on board*).

I heard one preacher explain it this way: God voted for you, the devil voted against you, and you cast the deciding vote.⁵ However, there's nothing here about anyone else voting except God:

The text states that "he chose."

According to 1:4, God chose "us." To whom does "us" refer? The word "us" originally referred to Paul and the saints in Ephesus (**1:1**). By extension, it refers to anyone who has the same faith that they did. The fact that you believe is proof you were chosen. Anyone has saving faith is chosen by God.

God did the voting, and we were the ones who got elected (to the office of salvation).

Look carefully at 1:4. What was the sphere in which the Father chose us? Election happened "in Christ".⁶ Jesus is an integral part of all this.

³ Tripp, "Holiness", Accessed March 12, 2024.

⁴ Joke: My dad voted republican his whole life, right up until he died. But ever since he died, he's voted democrat!

⁵ Adrian Rogers, personal sermon notes, 1980s.

⁶ God the Father planned in Christ for the salvation of the elect. However, for purposes of this lesson, it is best not to deal with the various interpretive options for "in Christ."

According to 1:4, when did this divine election take place? It took place before people were ever born, before the foundation of the world, before **Genesis 1:1**. This means that the dice have already been thrown. The outcome was decided before you got here.

NAS **2 Thessalonians 2:13** God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation ...

Classic Example of Election, Jacob and Esau:

ESV **Romans 9:10-12** ... when Rebecca had conceived children [Jacob & Esau] ... though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call—she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

Insight: The Bible only speaks of election in a positive sense, that God elected certain people to eternal life. God does not actively elect people for damnation.

All Are Agreed (Common Ground): In eternity past, before the foundation of the world, God chose to save some members of the human race, and to let the rest perish. All Christian denominations are agreed about this. *Everyone believes this doctrine.*

predestined

Not only did God elect certain people, but He also predestined certain people. According to 1:5, what was the purpose (goal/objective) for which God predestined people? God predestined people for adoption as His Sons.⁷

Does the concept of predestination frighten you? (Some people hate).

The sentence about predestination covers parts of 3 verses. It lies mostly in 1:5-6. However, it actually begins at the end of 1:4.⁸ What word at the end of 1:4 begins the sentence, and is associated with predestination (1:5)? Paul wrote that we were predestined "in love" (*agapé*, 1:5).

Why is it significant that we were predestined "in love" (1:4b)? Predestination is the fruit of God's amazing love. It is common for people to be upset by the doctrine of predestination; it is seen as a negative doctrine wherein an almost hateful God grudgingly ekes out salvation to a very few people. One misguided theologian wrote:

⁷ Some relate adoption to our ultimate glorification, but even so salvation is necessary for glorification. For time's sake, do not explain what adoption means at this point. The *ordo salutis* is Predestination, Election, Calling, Regeneration, Faith, Repentance, Justification, Adoption, Sanctification, Perseverance, Glorification.

⁸ As there were no punctuation marks in the Greek, it is possible that "in love" goes with the previous information.

“I do not believe in predestination because I do not believe that God brings people, kicking and screaming against their wills, into the kingdom, while He excludes others from His kingdom who desperately want to be saved”⁹

God does not bring people kicking and screaming into the kingdom or has ever excluded anyone who wanted to be there. In contrast, the Scripture clearly states that our predestination was based in God’s love, and that He has lavished blessings and grace upon us. The doctrine of divine election is not something to be afraid of.

Write “predestination” on board. **What does “pre” mean?** It means before.

What is a destination? It is where you going. If you call a travel agency, they will ask you what your destination is. Here in 1:5, it refers to your ultimate destination (heaven). The Bible never uses the word predestination in a negative sense as regards salvation. It only speaks of people being predestined for heaven (not hell).¹⁰

Look at the prepositions of predestination. Paul wrote that we were predestined “in” love (1:4) “for” adoption (1:5), “to” himself (1:5), “through” who (1:5)? It was “through” Jesus Christ. Jesus is an integral part of the equation. We were blessed in Christ (1:3), chosen in Christ (1:4) and predestined through Christ (1:5).

What else does 1:5 tell us about predestination? The basis for our predestination was “according to the purpose of His will” (1:5).

In 1:9, whose will was mentioned? It was “his will.”

Also in 1:9, whose purpose determined what happened? It was “his purpose.”

Looking ahead to 1:11, we see the word “predestined” again. What determined who got predestined? People were “predestined according to the purpose of him.”

In 1:11b, whose council was the deciding factor? It was “according to the council of his will.” Example: God said to Moses:

ESV **Romans 9:15-16** ... "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will ... but on God, who has mercy.

Based on 1:6, what should the truth of predestination cause you to do? A correct understanding should cause us to praise God’s glorious grace. A proper view of predestination will bless you (“he has blessed us in the beloved”, 1:6).

⁹ Karisa Bilmanis, “R.C. Sproul Explains the Important Doctrine of Election in ‘Chosen by God’”, Ligonier.org. Accessed 03/11/2024.

¹⁰ “Predestination is used in broader sense to refer God’s predestined will that Christ be crucified (Acts 4:27-28).

So What?

For what purpose did God choose and predestine us (1:4-5)? He chose us to be holy and blameless, and predestined us to be adopted as sons. As relates to salvation, two terms are essentially used interchangeably.¹¹

What determined who God chose and predestined (1:4-5)? Over and over again, it states that it is all according to God's purpose.

Why did Paul write that God had chosen and predestined these Ephesian believers (1:3-5)? What effect were these words designed to have on them? All the things God did for us constitute an amazing spiritual blessing. It is a package deal that includes predestination (1:3-10). The concept of predestination was included to show them how much God had blessed them. *Predestination is a blessing.*

God is in control of your eternal life and you are secure in Him. If salvation were a legal dispute, it would be called an open and shut case. **Read 1:13-14. Example:** Jesus said:

ESV **John 10:28-29** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Double Blessing: Predestination is such a blessing, that Paul wrote about it twice (1:5, 11).

Why did Paul write about election and predestination without any further explanation? How were they supposed to understand it? Some might say it was because predestination is beyond our understanding! However, Paul spent two years in Ephesus before he wrote this letter to them. He doubtless had already taught them the "rest of the story" in person. We, on the other hand, need to go to other New Testament writings to fill in the details of what be known.

God's Salvation Options

In his audio series, "Chosen by God", R.C. Sproul pointed out that God had various options in man's salvation.

Option #1—Save None: To give no one an opportunity for salvation. No grace, no mercy, only justice.

If God decided to punish the entire human race for rebelling against Him, would that be just? Yes; it would be totally fair.

¹¹ Kevin DeYoung, "What is the Difference Between Election and Predestination?", TheGospelCoalition.org. Accessed March 22, 2024.

Is God obligated to show us mercy? No; by definition, mercy is not obligatory; it is voluntary. No condemned criminal could pound his fist on the judge's desk and say, "I demand mercy!"

Aside: Grace is getting something good that you don't deserve. Mercy is not getting something bad that you do deserve. Justice is getting exactly what you deserve (which is bad since we all sin against a holy God).

What theoretical option would be the polar opposite of #1?

Option #2—Save All: To guarantee the salvation of everyone.

What is this called? What's the name for this belief? It is called universalism (God guarantees universal salvation). **Joke:** A modern advocate of this doctrine is a former mega-church pastor named Rob Bell. People use the phrase, "hell's bells", but now we have "Bells' hell" (which is no hell at all for anybody).

Could God do this? Does He have the ability to save everybody? Yes, but the Bible says He won't do this. Some will be in hell.

Now, since neither option 1 or 2 is correct, what is a 3rd option?

Option #3a—Save Some (Potentially): To give people an opportunity to be saved, but no guarantees. This is a generalization, but the idea is that God is sort of an "equal opportunity redeemer"! We could say that in option #3A, God gives those who hear the Gospel an equal chance to be saved. Whether a person accepts Christ or not is ultimately up to that person.¹²

Example: A man can open a store and stock it with inventory for sale, but he can't force any customers to come in and buy from him.

Some might say that God chose the plan of salvation (if you believe, you will be saved), but not the people of salvation. The problem with this idea is that Scripture says God chose "us", and predestined "us"—not a plan.

Option #3b—Save Some (Guaranteed): In this view, God chose the people of salvation. Specific people are predestined, and God works in their lives so as to make certain they come to faith in Christ.

¹² This view is associated with provisionism, and prevenient grace.

Fact: In position #3B, God does not treat everybody equally. God has predestined some for **mercy**, and the rest He passes over. One group gets mercy; the other group gets **justice**. So, you have mercy for some, and justice of the others.

*Who gets **injustice**?* No one get injustice. Mercy is non-justice (which is good), but it is not injustice (which is bad, sinful, evil; it is to be mistreated and abused).

Jesus: In a sense, the only person who ever got injustice from God is Jesus, who though sinless, willingly took our sins upon Himself on the cross. Jesus got injustice.

Example: Suppose a governor grants clemency to one condemned man, but not another. One gets mercy, the other gets justice. There is inequality, but not injustice.

Objection: You may object, “But that’s not fair!” No, it is not fair. The last thing you want from God is for God to be fair. If God is fair, we get justice and we all go to hell. What we want from God is mercy.

Big Question: Which of these options did God take? Which has God done, according to the Bible? (Rhetorical).

Here’s the Determining Factor: Does natural, fallen man have the ability to choose God? (Rhetorical). Does natural man have it within himself to choose to turn from his sins and embrace Jesus? Here is where the differences come in. We will explore what Jesus said about that in our next session.

The Basis for God’s Choice

The \$64,000 Question is, why did God elect certain people, but not others? (Rhetorical). What determined who got picked? Why did God pick those who God picked? What was the basis for God’s choice? (Let class speculate). There are two historic answers:

1. It was based on whether or not a person believes in Jesus (*write: “man’s faith”*). God’s reason for electing someone was based on His supernatural knowledge that that person—given the chance—would, of his own free will, *believe in Jesus*. Divine election hinged on man’s will, man’s choice, man’s faith.

Example: Smokey Robinson sang, “If you feel like giving me a lifetime of devotion, I second that emotion.” God is singing, “If you” (the human) “feel like giving me” (God) “a lifetime of devotion, I” (God) “second that emotion.” God is merely responding to your faith.

The trigger point for election is ultimately our faith in Jesus. This is the official position today of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, and many Evangelical churches (such as the Methodists, Pentecostals, Calvary Chapel, and many Baptists).

2. It was based purely on God's purpose, God's pleasure, God's mercy (*write: "God's mercy."*) God's choice had nothing to do with knowledge that someone would believe in Jesus. The idea is that man is so deeply impacted by sin (in mind, will, and emotion), that we would never of our own free will believe in Jesus.

Election is based purely on God's pleasure, on God's will (not man's will); on mercy, not merit. God's choice was not hinged on God's will. This is the view of the Protestant Reformers ("Reformed" or Reformation view of salvation). It is held by Presbyterians, Anglicans, Dutch Reformed, Sovereign Grace Baptists, and others.

Summary: We are looking at cause, and effect.

In View #1, Is election the cause of faith, or is faith the cause of election? My faith in Jesus is the cause, and the effect is that God elected me in response.

In View #2, what is cause and what is effect? My faith in Jesus is the effect that is caused by God electing me.

The Issue: In what way does God's omniscience come into account when He made His choices? (*Rhetorical*). This is where Christians disagree.

The Reformation view is that God knew that, if given the opportunity, no one would believe in Jesus. So, God in love, graciously chose some people for mercy and predestined them to believe in Jesus. **Examples:**

ESV **Ephesians 2:1** ... you were dead in the trespasses and sins ...

ESV **Romans 3:11** no one understands; no one seeks for God.

ESV **1 Corinthians 2:14** The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God ...

ESV **John 6:65** ... no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.

Three Historic Views of Salvation

R.C. Sproul further pointed out that here are three basic views of salvation. Most of us in this room hold to one of these three. The three are best represented by three theologians: Pelagius, Arminius, Augustine (*write across top of board*).

The Question: *How important is God's grace in man's salvation? (Write on left-hand side of board, beneath names)*

Pelagius: British monk who lived around A.D. 400. Pelagius denied man's basic sinfulness. *How important is God's grace to man's salvation?* **Answer: 0%.** It is not

important at all. No grace is necessary. Man needs no help from God. This is a non-Christian position, condemned at the Council of Carthage in A.D. 418.¹³

ESV **Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved ...

Augustine: Church bishop who lived in North Africa (Algeria) around A.D. 400. *How important is God's grace to man's salvation?* **Answer: 100%.** He said salvation is all of grace. Whereas Pelagius was a heretic, Augustine was a hero.

Augustine further countered that man is absolutely dependent on God's grace, even for his initial response to the Gospel. Augustine taught "irresistible grace"—you cannot ultimately refuse God's grace if you are one of the Elect. Grace is like one of cupid's arrows, once you are hit, you are a goner to love. Parallel to this, he taught what theologians now call the "effectual calling" of God for the elect. Many people have heard the general call to believe the Gospel, but the effectual call of God is internal and effective (a person can't effectively resist the effectual call of God!).

ESV **Ephesians 2:8** ... by grace (f) you have been saved (m) through faith (f). And this (n) is not your own doing; it is the gift of God ...

Exactly what is it that is not our own doing (2:8)? To what does the pronoun "this" (Eph 2:8) refer? Does it refer to faith, saved or grace? Normally a pronoun refers back to the immediately preceding noun. In this case that would be faith. Greek nouns have one of three genders (masculine, feminine or neuter). The word "this" will have the same gender as whatever word it refers back to. Both grace and faith are feminine; saved is a masculine participle. The pronoun "this" is neuter—meaning it refers back to the whole process of salvation. None of it is our own doing. Grace is a gift of God. Being saved is a gift of God. Faith is a gift of God. Thus, according to Augustine's understanding of the Gospel, regeneration precedes faith; even our faith is the result of God's grace.

Semi-Pelagianism: Parallel to this, in the A.D. 400s, group of monks in France promoted a theology mid-way between Pelagius and Augustine. They taught that man was indeed sinful and needed God's grace to be saved, but that fallen man still had the innate ability to believe in Jesus. This was condemned in the Synod of Orange in 529 AD. However, at the Council of Trent (1500s), the Roman Catholic Church reversed course and essentially adopted semi-pelagianism.

Arminius (Jacob):¹⁴ After the Protestant Reformation, a fourth view arose, best represented by Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius, who lived in the 1500's in Holland. *How important is God's grace to man's salvation?* Arminius said fallen man is incapable of have a saving faith. However, he taught, God grants enough grace to people to bring them up to the point of having the ability to have saving faith. So: **100% + human cooperation.** Man cannot be saved apart from grace, but man must

¹³ HC Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 260.

¹⁴ Don't confuse Arminians (a theological group) with Armenians (an ethnic group)!

cooperate with grace before God will save him. Thanks to God's grace, fallen man now has the ability to accept or reject God's grace.

Difference: Both are within the household of faith; both are within historic Christian orthodoxy. The difference between Augustine and Arminius is over man's ability to respond to the Gospel: The Arminian view is that even though man is born unable to belief, God gives grace to overcome man's predisposition to sin, so that man has the ability accept or reject Jesus. This belief puts fallen man in the same situation that Semi-Pelagianism does.

Which of these views would say God's election is based on foreseen faith?

Which of these two would say God's election is based purely on God's mercy?

Who's Who Predestination Scorecard

Arminian (Ability to Resist Grace): Arminius, John Wesley, Charles Finney, Billy Graham, Adrian Rogers, Charles Stanley, Norman Giesler, Chuck Smith, Dave Hunt, Andrew Murray, AW Tozer, RA Torrey, Layton Flowers.

Augustinian (Inability to Resist Grace): Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin (blame for the doctrine goes on Calvin, but this is historically untrue), Jonathan Edwards (Sproul said that when you get these 1st five guys to agree on a doctrine, it got his attention!), Francis Schaefer, JI Packer, CH Spurgeon, John Piper, DA Carson, John McArthur, Tim Keller, AW Pink, John Knox, Matthew Henry, George Whitefield, William Carrey, Doug Wilson, Paul Washer, Al Mohler,

Next Week: *Does fallen man have the ability to believe in Jesus?*

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45-minute session and are based on the ESV.

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Extra Material

- **“riches” (1:7):** From *ploutos* (basis for plutocrat); Ploutos was the Greek god of wealth.¹⁵

¹⁵ “Pluto: Mythology”, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pluto_(mythology).

Whom: The text (**Ro 8:29**) doesn't say that predestination was based on WHAT God foreknew, it says that predestination was based on WHO God foreknew.

What is redemption (1:7)? The Greek word is *apolutrosis*, which means "a release effected by the payment of a ransom." In the old days, soda pop bottles could be redeemed; the bottler would pay you money in exchange for the bottle. If you redeem a coupon, the manufacturer will pay you money for the coupon (if you buy their product). So, it means to recover ownership by paying a specified sum, and thus to set free or to rescue or to ransom.